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C O N F I D E N T I A L KIGALI 000225

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/11/2017
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [RW](#)
SUBJECT: JOURNALIST UNDER FIRE AFTER KAGAME-HITLER
COMPARISON

REF: KIGALI 107

Classified By: CDA Cheryl Sim, reason 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (U) Bonaventure Bizumuremyi, editor-in-chief of Umuco (an independent Kinyarwanda-language paper), is being sought by Rwandan authorities after the publication of a highly controversial and inflammatory March 12 - 27 issue that among other things compared President Kagame to Hitler. The major piece written under a pseudonym (Jason Mukasa) used the issuance of 40 Spanish indictments against Rwandan military officers (reftel) as a starting point for an analysis of the future of Kagame's administration. The author outlined four potential options for Kagame in response to the indictments: present himself to an International Criminal Court; maintain his presidency for life to avoid eventual prosecution; seek exile; or commit suicide. Other stories accused senior military officials of misdeeds, and suggested Hutu ministers in the Cabinet are monitored by subordinate Tutsi ministers of state. Bizumuremyi went into hiding once the issue hit the streets.

¶2. (U) Immediately thereafter, a group of journalists and members of the pro-government Rwanda Media Ethics Commission (RMEC) condemned the controversial articles and brought a complaint before the High Council of the Press (HCP). The HCP subsequently issued a press release formally condemning the paper, Bizumuremyi and Mukasa, as well as endorsing the recommendations of the RMEC to revoke Bizumuremyi's press card for 12 months and suspend publication of Umuco for the same duration. Rwandan National Police Spokesman Marcel Higirow called on Rwandans via a radio communiqu   to assist in locating Bizumuremyi and to alert the authorities with any information on his whereabouts.

¶3. (C) Observers speculate that if arrested, Bizumuremyi will face defamation and genocide ideology charges and a possible jail sentence. Debate over the case on a Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF - the ruling party) web-forum has been heated, with some posters calling for punishment for Bizumuremyi and Mukasa that will "hit them where it hurts." Other independent journalists, notably Jean Bosco Gasasira and Charles Kabonero, have also publicly criticized the articles, while privately expressing the need to proceed with caution when writing about Kagame. In a separate meeting with the Ambassador, newly-appointed Minister of Information Louise Mushikiwabo called the comparison between Kagame and Hitler "beyond offensive - intolerable." If caught, Bizumuremyi will likely face the maximum sentence available under Rwandan law.

¶4. (C) Bizumuremyi, an outspoken Tutsi genocide survivor and

former Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) soldier, has had problems with the government before. In 2006, he was charged with defamation, divisionism, and disobeying public authorities over 2005 and 2006 Umuco articles that "insulted President Kagame," and for noncompliance with a 2006 police summons. "Jason Mukasa," was not located in an HCP journalist database. There is speculation that it is a pseudonym for Bizumuremyi or for other government critics living outside Rwanda.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Publication of side-by-side photographs of Adolf Hitler, the perpetrator of the Holocaust, and Paul Kagame, seen by many as the man who ended the Rwandan genocide, was an extremely provocative and insulting move by Umuco, especially as the 14th anniversary of the genocide approaches. Umuco, along with other independent newspapers, has been under government scrutiny in recent months, and this issue provides ample pretext for the government to shut it down. While the Government of Rwanda continues to struggle with press freedom issues, the genocide remains an incredibly sensitive topic, not least because of the active role the media played in that tragedy. In this case, there will be little chance arguments for complete press freedom, to include equating Kagame with one of humanity's greatest villains and perpetrators of genocide, will fall on anything but deaf ears within government circles. End comment.

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